Form 10-309 (July 1969)

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR .NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:		
Virginia		
COUNTY:		
Portsmouth	(in	cit.)

FOR NPS USE ONLY ENTRY NUMBER 1070 DATE

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	X District Building	☐ Public	Publ	ic Acquisition;		X Occupied .	Yes:	
	Site Structure	☐ Private		☐ In Process		Unoccupied	Restric	ted
	□ Object	Both		 Being Consid 	lered	Preservation work	X Unrestr	icted
						in progress	☐ No	
1	PRESENT USE (Check One or A	More as Appropriat	e)					
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		dustrial	-	rate Residence		Transportation	Comment:	
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	(Check One)		(Che	ck One)
	PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL		Moved	K Original Site

The Olde Towne Conservation Project encompasses nearly twenty blocks in the northeastern section of Portsmouth overlooking Crawford Bay. The district's streets are laid out in a grid pattern, with the east-west streets generally more narrow than the north-south streets. Nearly all the streets are tree-lined, and they retain their granite curbs and their brick or stone slab sidewalks. The district is densely built up, primarily containing two- and three-story townhouses set close together on narrow lots. Brick and frame construction is used in nearly equal proportion throughout the area.

While the district is noted chiefly for its many Federal and Greek Revival townhouses, it is also interspersed with numerous post-Civil War and early-twentieth-century structures. Architecturally, the later structures are generally compatible with the earlier ones and serve to unify the block facades.

Nearly all of the Federal and Greek Revival townhouses stand on high English basements, with exterior access to the principal floor gained by a long flight of wooden steps. This arrangement is a characteristic feature of Portsmouth architecture, and it gives the district a distinctive quality.

Although many individual structures have been restored in recent years, the district has never been in a state of serious decay. At present it is about to undergo a general redevelopment, with plans calling for the closing of several streets, the creation of park-like malls and neighborhood parking lots within the blocks.

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PERIOD (Check One or More as	Appropriate)		
Pre-Columbian	☐ 16th Century	29 18th Century	20th Century
15th Century	☐ 17th Century	2 19th Century	
SPECIFIC DATE(5) (If Applicat	le and Known)		
AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Ch	eck One or More as Appropri	nte)	
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Prehistoric	Engineering	Religion/Phile	Other (Specify)
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☐ Agriculture	Invention 1		1-4-3-1
	Londscape	☐ Sculpture	-14 12:11:1
☐ Art	Architecture	Social/Human-	
Commerce	Literature	iterian	
☐ Communications	Military	Theater	-
Conservation	Music	☐ Transportation	

Portsmouth was founded in 1752 when Colonel William Crawford set aside approximately sixty-five acres of his plantation on the Elizabeth River to be laid off for a town. The new town was named in honor of the great English naval port and dockyard city. The original western boundary of Fortsmouth was Court Street, although in 1763 it was extended to Chestnut Street, thus encompassing the entire area of "Olde Towne." Portsmouth was occupied by the British four times during the Revolution, but it did not suffer such extensive damage as Norfolk did. The town, however, retains few structures that can be identified positively as colonial. Most of "Olde Towne's" early structures were built in the Greek Revival period, though several date from the late-eighteenth century.

Predominate throughout "Olde Towne" is the so-called "basement house," an early-nineteenth-century architectural form characteristic of Portsmouth. Because of Portsmouth's low-lying situation, basements could not be dug, and on the town's small lots outside kitchens were not feasible, so the serving and dining areas were located in an above-ground "basement." Perhaps the best example of the "basement house" is the Hill House, built in the first half of the nineteenth century by Captain John Thompson and now used as a house museum and as headquarters of the Portsmouth Historical Association.

Other important houses in the area include the 1799 Watts House, in which Chief Black Hawk and Henry Clay were entertained; the Washington Reed House and the Bain House, two excellent examples of Federal architecture; the recently restored Grice-Neely House, an important Greek Revival townhouse with outstanding iron decoration; and the Nivison-Ball House, an eighteenth-century gambrel roof house moved several blocks in 1869 to its present location on Middle Street. Probably the oldest house in the area, the Nivison-Ball House received both the Marquis de Lafayette and Andrew Jackson.

A significant assemblage of late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century urban architecture, "Olde Towne" is also the only early townscape in the historic Hampton Roads area. The efforts of interested citizens to restore and develop this area to its fullest potential resulted in the establishment in 1968 of the Olde Towne Conservation Project, the first federally-assisted conservation project in Virginia.

Gr	imsley, Ed., "The	New Vitali	I ASSO	Cla	our Flags, 1752-196 ation, 1961. ctsmouth," The Comm		
	(January, 1969),	28-33.					
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Date

Keeper of The National Register

Form 10-301 (July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY MAP FORM

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with map)

STATE	
Virginia	
COUNTY	
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FOR NPS USE ONL	

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AND/OR HISTORIC: Portsmouth			
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TO BE INCLUDED ON ALL MAPS		The transfer of the transfer o	
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2. North arrow.			

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR STATE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE Virginia COUNTY NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES Portsmouth (in cit.) PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM FOR NPS USE ONLY ENTRY NUMBER COTTO DATE (Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph) S OLI Z 1. NAME 0 COMMON: Portsmouth Olde Towne Conservation Project AND OR HISTORIC: Portsmouth LOCATION STREET AND NUMBER: Bounded on the north by Crawford Parkway, on the south by U London St., on the east by Elizabeth River, and extending .1 mi. west of \supset 2 Portsmouth \vdash STATE: CODE COUNTY: CODE Virginia 45 (in cit.) 740 PHOTO REFERENCE Z PHOTO CREDIT: Fariss Pictures, Inc. DATE OF PHOTO: 1968 ш NEGATIVE FILED AT: Fariss Pictures, Inc. Norfolk, Virginia ш 4. IDENTIFICATION DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC View of Benthall-Brooks Row, 411, 415, 419, 421 Crawford Parkway from the West.

